Mob Boss Takes the 5th on JFK Death

Associated Press photo
Santo Trafficante waits to appear before House probers of JFK death.

By JOSEPH VOLZ

Washington (News Bureau)—Santo Trafficante, reputed mob boss of Florida, took the Fifth Amendment and refused to answer yesterday when he was asked by congressional investigators whether he had discussed the assassination of President John F. Kennedy several months before Kennedy's murder in Dallas in 1963.

Trafficante, of Tampa, who reportedly operated lucrative gambling rackets in Cuba until Fidel Castro came to power in 1959, took the Fifth Amendment against self-incrimination a total of 15 times in response to questions from the House Assassinations Committee.

The committee chairman, Rep. Louis Stokes (D-Ohio), said the panel would decide later whether to try to have the dapper Trafficante cited for contempt of Congress.

There have been reports that Trafficante predicted in Florida, several months before Kennedy's death on Nov. 22, 1963, that Kennedy would be killed.

Stokes said that the committee had known before Trafficante walked into the crowded hearing room that Trafficante would refuse to answer questions. There was speculation that the troubled Assassinations Committee — told by House Democratic leaders to come up with something dramatic or get out of business in two weeks — had rushed the reputed mobster before the panel.

The questions included: Was Trafficante involved in plotting to kill Fidel Castro? Did Trafficante ever meet Jack Ruby, who killed Lee Harvey Oswald, Kennedy's assassin? Most of these questions have been answered, to some extent, elsewhere.

For example, the Senate Intelligence Committee reported that Trafficante, using the name Joe, had sat in on Miami planning sessions during the abortive CIA-Mafia program to kill Castro in the early 1960s. John Rosselli, a Miami mafioso who was the leader of the plotting, was killed after testifying before the Senate panel.

Sam (Momo) Giancana, Chicago Mafia boss, also participated in the abortive operation. He was slain in 1975, the day before Senate investigators were to quiz him. The murders of Rosselli and Giancana remain unsolved.

operation in Cuba if Castro were overthrown.

Trafficante appeared unimpressed with the committee proceedings yesterday. He was on time, standing in the aisle with his attorney, but the committee meeting started a half hour late because Trafficante's microphone did not work. The first thing Trafficante did was invoke a House rule that permitted him to bar TV crews and tape recorders from the room.

Committee investigators apparently became interested in Trafficante because he had ties with both the CIA and the Cuban community. The CIA and various pro and anti-Cuban groups have been mentioned by some conspira-